

Rat-Catcher

By: Megan E. Tripaldi

*With text from William Shakespeare's **Romeo and Juliet***

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CHARACTER BREAKDOWN:

**Note: All characters are meant to be in late middle school/high school, but can be played by adults if need be.

MAURA - The book worm, actually prepared. Benvolio.

TAYLOR - The class clown. Mercutio.

EDGAR - The peace keeper. Romeo.

BEN - The outsider. Tybalt.

Rat Catcher

SETTING: A table in the back corner of a library.

AT RISE: MAURA enters, hunched from an over-stuffed backpack and carrying a stack of books. She sets down the backpack with a thud and begins to unpack another pile of books. TAYLOR enters soon after and gapes at the piles. She gives MAURA a silent “what the hell is this?” and MAURA shrugs, cracking open one of the books. TAYLOR shakes her head and sets down her stuff. EDGAR enters, finishing a quick text and then nods a hello. He unpacks his stuff and sits.

EDGAR:

Is Ben here yet?

TAYLOR:

He wasn't here when I got here. Maura?

MAURA:

(Not even looking up from her book.)

Hmm?

TAYLOR:

Of course he's not here. He has barely done any of the work for this project.

EDGAR:

Yeah, but he has, like a hard time at home.

TAYLOR:

Oh my god, I don't care.

EDGAR:

Dude.

TAYLOR:

What! I don't want to get a bad grade because he won't do his work!

EDGAR:

Mrs. Speck wouldn't do that to us. I mean, come on, she knows what he does.

TAYLOR:

I know, but -

EDGAR:

Let's just do this, it's the last part of the project, so let's just finish, ok?

TAYLOR:

Fine. Maura? Maura. Helloooo?

MAURA:

What? Sorry, let me just -

(She speed-reads her last paragraph.)

And - yes! Ok. Hello, I'm here. Is Ben here yet?

TAYLOR:

Good book?

MAURA:

What?

TAYLOR:

Never mind. Did you get the scene from Mrs. Speck?

MAURA:

Yup! Let me just -

(She digs through her bag. It takes a while.)

TAYLOR:

Jeeze, do you throw anything away?

EDGAR:

Apparently not.

MAURA:

You never know when it's going to be on a test. Hang on, almost - nope, wait -

EDGAR:

Our own personal Hermione Granger.

TAYLOR:

Dude, shut up about *Harry Potter* already.

EDGAR:

Never.

MAURA:

(She pulls out a folder. It's not the right one. She pulls out another folder and pulls out the scene.)

Got it. Act three, Scene One.

(She passes out copies.)

EDGAR:

Oh, this is the fight, right?

TAYLOR:

Yeah. It's when shit goes down!

MAURA:

Don't swear.

TAYLOR:

Sorry.

EDGAR:

Ok, so what just happened in the last scene?

TAYLOR:

Oh! The, um - you know, the, the guy -

MAURA:

The Friar.

TAYLOR:

Yeah! The Friar and, um the lady, Juliet's lady -

MAURA:

The Nurse.

TAYLOR:

Right! The Nurse. They are helping - um - help.

MAURA:

It's Romeo and Juliet's wedding.

TAYLOR:

Right! And the Friar and the Nurse are there and they get married, Romeo and Juliet I mean, not the Nurse and - right?

(MAURA nods.)

Yeah. They get married and - that's it?

MAURA:

Yup. But it's in secret.

TAYLOR:

Awesome.

EDGAR:

Cool! So in our scene it's Mercutio and Benvolio and Romeo and Tybalt and that's it, right?

TAYLOR:

I think so.

MAURA:

Yes! It's the scene where Mercutio and Tybalt fight and Tybalt kills Mercutio, then Romeo kills Tybalt and Benvolio has to explain everything to the Prince.

TAYLOR:

Oh, is that what he's doing? I couldn't pay attention, this language is so weird.

EDGAR:

So, what's the first part of the assignment say?

MAURA:

Oh! Um -

(She digs again.)

TAYLOR:

No, no I've got it!

(She easily pulls it out of her bag and reads.)

"Exploring the Text. Please look at your assigned scene with your group and choose a cast. As you are going through the scene write down the feelings/emotions that your character is experiencing, both internally and externally, then use these feelings to make the scene your own. Use clues in the text to guide your choices. Be ready to present your scene on Monday and discuss the discoveries you made when rehearsing the scene."

EDGAR:

Do we have to memorize it?

TAYLOR:

Doesn't say.

EDGAR:

I'm just going to take that as a no.

TAYLOR:

I mean, there's not enough time.

MAURA:

I might.

TAYLOR:

Of course you will.

EDGAR:

Ok, so maybe we'll try and then we can decide? Like, if one of us still needs the paper, we all can at least hold it?

TAYLOR:

Agreed.

MAURA:

Agreed.

EDGAR:

Cool. Ok, so who wants to play what?

TAYLOR:

I totally want to be Mercutio. He's a badass.

EDGAR:

Come on!

TAYLOR:

Dude, I was born to play Mercutio.

EDGAR:

Oh, whatever.

MAURA:

I'd like to be Benvolio, if that's ok.

EDGAR:

Totally. So which one should I be, Romeo or Tybalt?

TAYLOR:

Umm...Romeo.

EDGAR:

Really?

TAYLOR:

Yeah, totally. He's the hero of the play. Tybalt is the worst. We should just make Ben take him as a punishment.

EDGAR:

Yeah. I guess that's a -

(As if cued by his name BEN enters. He is dressed as if he had to pull clothes from the hamper and is wearing sunglasses. He throws a ratty shoulder bag covered in pins and patches on the floor and slumps into a chair, mumbling his greeting.)

BEN:

Sorry'mlate.

TAYLOR:

Again.

EDGAR:

Dude.

BEN:

Won't happen again.

TAYLOR:

No, because this is the last time we have to meet before the presentation.

EDGAR:

Dude.

TAYLOR:

What?

EDGAR:

Chill.

(TAYLOR slumps in her chair.)

So, we were just assigning parts. Maura is Benvolio, Taylor is Mercutio, I'm Romeo. Are you cool with Tybalt?

(BEN shrugs.)

Ok, um...So let's do this thing?

TAYLOR:

Ok, but like, what are we doing exactly?

EDGAR:

What do you mean?

TAYLOR:

Like, how are we doing this? We need, I dunno, like a director or something.

EDGAR:

Oh, uh - Maura?

MAURA:

What? Oh, um - well, why don't we just read it through first to ourselves? We can stop if we have any questions.

EDGAR:

Great.

TAYLOR:

Fine by me.

EDGAR:

You good, man?

(BEN nods.)

Ok, let's do this.

(They read to themselves. When they have a question they speak the lines out loud, flat and with very little emotion. It's obvious that this is the first time they've spoken it out loud.)

TAYLOR:

Ok, I have a question already. Edgar, can you read this part?

EDGAR:

Yeah, sure!

BENVOLIO

*I pray thee, good Mercutio, let's retire:
The day is hot, the Capulets abroad,
And, if we meet, we shall not scape a brawl;
For now, these hot days, is the mad blood stirring.*

MERCUTIO

*Come, come, thou art as hot a Jack in thy mood as
any in Italy, and as soon moved to be moody, and as
soon moody to be moved.*

TAYLOR:

Ok, so what does that mean?

MAURA:

So, he's saying that Benvolio wants to leave because he is afraid of getting into a fight, but he would just as soon as fight as anyone else if provoked. You know, hot has a double meaning there. Hot as in hot from the weather and hot as in hot-blooded; like quick to fight.

TAYLOR:

Oh, oh. Got it. Cool.

(They read.)

MERCUTIO

*And but one word with one of us? couple it with
something; make it a word and a blow.*

TAYLOR:

Is that blow like stabbing?

(MAURA nods.)

Cool.

MERCUTIO

Consort! what, dost thou make us minstrels?

TAYLOR:

Ok, so what - ?

MAURA:

He's calling him gay.

TAYLOR:

Right, because that was bad back then.

EDGAR:

Apparently.

MERCUTIO

Consort! what, dost thou make us minstrels?

(She pronounces 'zounds' like it's spelled, like 'rounds'.)

'Zounds, consort!

MAURA:

It's pronounced 'zoonds'.

TAYLOR:

'Zoonds?'

MAURA:

Yup.

TAYLOR:

Uh, ok. That's weird.

MERCUTIO

'Zounds, consort!

ROMEO

Tybalt, the reason that I have to love thee

*Doth much excuse the appertaining rage
To such a greeting: villain am I none;
Therefore farewell; I see thou know'st me not.*

EDGAR:

Ok, so like - he's saying that he shouldn't hate him because, like, he married Juliet. But he can't actually say that, right? I remember that from class.

MAURA:

Exactly. He can't say it out loud, but he really wants to. Like, "don't hate me, we're cousins now!"

EDGAR:

Got it.

ROMEO

*I do protest, I never injured thee,
But love thee better than thou canst devise,
Till thou shalt know the reason of my love:
And so, good Capulet,--which name I tender
As dearly as my own,--be satisfied.*

EDGAR:

Yup - there it is. Because Capulet is Juliet's - I get it.

MERCUTIO

(To TYBALT.)

*O calm, dishonourable, vile submission!
Tybalt, you rat-catcher, will you walk?*

MAURA:

Actually, that first part is to Romeo.

TAYLOR:

But I'm calling him vile, isn't that to Tybalt because I hate him?

MAURA:

No, you're saying Romeo walking away is dishonourable. Like, his 'submission' to Tybalt is a betrayal of his house.

TAYLOR:

Ok. But, the second part - ?

MAURA:

Yeah, you're totally picking a fight with Tybalt.

TAYLOR:

Awesome.

MERCUTIO

Tybalt, you rat-catcher, will you walk?

TAYLOR:

Buh buh buh...

MERCUTIO

*Good king of cats, nothing but one of your nine
lives;*

TAYLOR:

Ok, so why do they always call him a cat?

MAURA:

They're insulting him.

TAYLOR:

Yeah, but cats are awesome. Why wouldn't they call him, like, a pig or something?

EDGAR:

Can we just finish this, please?

TAYLOR:

Ok, ok, jeeze. Sorry for asking questions.

(They read. TAYLOR commontates. BEN and EDGAR half-heartedly fight with their fingers.)

Yadda yadda yadda. Fight, fight, fight. Mercutio is dead, Tybalt is dead. Romeo's upset. Aaaaand scene.

(They take a moment for the dust of the scene to settle.)

EDGAR:

Yeah, so that was cool.

TAYLOR:

Totally.

MAURA:

Yeah. I think that once we -

EDGAR:

So I'm good if you guys are.

MAURA:

What?

TAYLOR:

I'm totally good. I think I get it now. Thanks, Maura.

MAURA:

Oh, you're welcome, but -

EDGAR:

So we can, like, look at the lines over the weekend, but I feel like we're good for class.

MAURA:

But what about the emotional stuff?

EDGAR:

We have it covered. Tybalt is freaking out because he hates Romeo and Romeo feels bad for Tybalt because he married Juliet who is his cousin. And Mercutio and Benvolio don't know, so they just think it's another fight that gets out of hand. Easy.

TAYLOR:

Yeah, yeah! And that's why Mercutio is so wiggled out when Romeo walks away.

EDGAR:

Right! Boom, easy.

TAYLOR:

We so got this.

(They start to gather their stuff. BEN snorts.)

What? We did the assignment.

BEN:

Barely. We did a half-assed reading and analysis of the 'feelings' and that's it. You don't even want to put a little more than the bare minimum of effort into this?

TAYLOR:

Well, you know, it's not like you have.

BEN:

What does that mean?

EDGAR:

Dude -

TAYLOR:

No! I'm tired of doing all the work when he does nothing!

EDGAR:

Ok, ok -

TAYLOR:

No! He is always late, he barely does any work, and we do *everything* -

EDGAR:

Well, actually, you know technically Maura does everything.

TAYLOR:

What?

MAURA:

What?

EDGAR:

Yeah. She is always prepared, she is the one who actually knows what happens in this play. What have you done?

MAURA:

Edgar thank you, but -

TAYLOR:

I do the reading! I do the work! It's just that Shakespeare is hard. It's weird language, it's not the way we talk! I mean Maura knows everything, but we're not all geniuses like her -

MAURA:

Oh, please don't involve me -

TAYLOR:

I mean, I don't see you with all the answers.

EDGAR:

Jeeze, I'm sorry, ok? I just - I mean it's true.

TAYLOR:

I do the work though! I can't believe you would even say that -

EDGAR:

I said I was sorry!

TAYLOR:

Ok!

(Beat.)

MAURA:

So, what are your thoughts, Ben?

BEN:

What?

MAURA:

Oh, I just - I mean I think there is more to explore in the scene and you seem to feel the same way.

BEN:

I mean, yeah.

(She stares at him.)

Ok, so - Ok, you guys all seem to hate Tybalt -

MAURA:

I don't hate -

BEN:

- but he's actually got a lot more going on than he shows.

TAYLOR:

Like what?

BEN:

I mean, look at his life, for one.

TAYLOR:

Ok. He hates the Montagues, he's just following in his family's footsteps. He's just a bully. Done.

BEN:

Well, yeah it looks like that on the outside, but did you ever think that maybe he has no other choice?

MAURA:

Oo, interesting...

(She begins scribbling in a notebook.)

TAYLOR:

How can he have no other choice?

EDGAR:

Well, yeah it is following what his family does, but doesn't he have that choice? I mean he's old enough to -

BEN:

Old enough to think for himself, yeah sure, but he's still a teenager.

EDGAR:

Wait, how old is he?

MAURA:

He's like, sixteen or seventeen, which I mean - like, Juliet is getting married at fourteen -

TAYLOR:

So yeah, in his society he's practically an adult -

BEN:

He is still living with his family, he can't leave, even if he wants to -

MAURA:

Well, he has advantages that Juliet doesn't. He's older and he's also male -

TAYLOR:

Plus, he's made it obvious that he doesn't want to.

BEN:

How?

TAYLOR:

Because he won't stop picking fights.

BEN:

Oh, and people who want to get out of their house never act out? Look, I mean his home life doesn't seem too great from my point of view.

EDGAR:

Wait, how? Isn't his family rich?

BEN:

Money has nothing to do with it.

EDGAR:

But when do we actually get to see Tybalt's home life at all? I mean this is all just speculation at this point.

MAURA:

Well, Capulet is pretty awful to him at the ball.

TAYLOR:

I don't remember that part...

MAURA:

Yeah, he pulls him aside when he threatens to kick Romeo out of the ball.

(She digs out the play and reads the line.)

*You are a saucy boy: is't so, indeed?
This trick may chance to scathe you, I know what:
You must contrary me! marry, 'tis time.
Well said, my hearts! You are a princex; go:
Be quiet, or—More light, more light! For shame!
I'll make you quiet.*

(She closes the book.)

So...

EDGAR:

He's so mean to him. And, and he keeps trying to cover it, like, "More light, more light!" He's trying to keep the party going!

MAURA:

Exactly.

EDGAR:

So he is totally tragic. Like, you never hear about his parents, maybe he doesn't have them? Maybe he is like *Harry Potter*, right?

TAYLOR:

Oh my god, *again* with the *Harry Potter* -

EDGAR:

Like he was dropped on his aunt and uncle's doorstep even though they already had a kid, in this case Juliet, and they have to take care of him now. And that's why they are so mean to him. Like, maybe they resent him! Oh man. My mind is blown.

BEN:

There you go.

TAYLOR:

No, I still don't buy it.

EDGAR:

How? The evidence is right there -

(MAURA holds up the book.)

TAYLOR:

Yeah, but like Harry had a choice, right? He chose to be good. He chose to sacrifice himself for the world. Why couldn't Tybalt make the same choice?

MAURA:

Well, there were other parts of *Harry Potter* that we're not taking into account - I mean the element of self-sacrifice that was kind of forced on him at the end. Either keep living or defeat the ultimate evil. That was never really a choice for Tybalt. But before we get into this I need us to agree that just because the story is relatable to the text in this moment doesn't mean the author isn't *extremely* problematic because of her transphobic rants.

(A general murmur of agreement.)

Great.

EDGAR:

Nice analysis.

(Fist-bumps MAURA.)

MAURA:

Thank you.

BEN:

Exactly. Tybalt is not Harry Potter.

TAYLOR:

No. Because Harry Potter is good. Tybalt is not.

EDGAR:

Well, correct me if I'm wrong, but it's not just a question of good versus evil here. I mean, humans are more complex than that.

MAURA:

Yeah, the circumstances and the condition of his environment is very different to Harry's.

BEN:

Right. Tybalt needs to escape, but he can't. This life, this family is what he has.

(EDGAR coughs.)

Yeah, yeah I know it's similar, but everyone is different. Can we agree on that?

(EDGAR concedes.)

And Tybalt is only, what sixteen? Seventeen? There is nothing he can do to except wait and act according to his situation.

MAURA:

And in this case he has learned that violence and anger get results. It's how he was raised.

BEN:

Exactly. He learned about using pain to solve problems, not love. He knows nothing else.

TAYLOR:

Oh god, come on! You are so full of it.

BEN:

What are you talking about?

TAYLOR:

You come in here all Judd Nelson in *The Breakfast Club* with your sunglasses and your ripped jeans and you expect me to feel bad for you? You think you relate to Tybalt, is that it?

EDGAR:

Taylor -

BEN:

I never said that.

TAYLOR:

Well maybe you need to open your eyes, ok? Maybe you aren't the only one in pain here.

MAURA:

Uh, guys -

TAYLOR:

See, I know what it feels like to want to escape. You don't know how hard my life is, you don't know what I've been through! You can't even imagine -

EDGAR:

Dude. I'm serious, stop -

TAYLOR:

No, he needs to know. Because you *can* choose good or bad. He just refuses to accept that because it takes away any responsibility that he has to make the right decisions. Like, oh I don't know, not screwing over your group for a month and then deciding to be all profound at the last minute with all this bullshit about a character that is just plain and simple, a piece of shit.

MAURA:

TAYLOR!

BEN:

No. No, she's right. You're right. Your life is not like mine and I don't know how you deal with all the complexities and the issues that you may have. But here's the thing: I also don't give a shit.

(He walks away from her. TAYLOR pushes him into a table and then gets in his face.)

MAURA:

Oh my god!

EDGAR:

What the hell!?

TAYLOR:

You are rude. You waste our time. You don't do the work. And you are constantly a dick to everyone!

(She pushes him again.)

EDGAR:

Stop it!

TAYLOR:

Why? Why are you like this? Why do you want us to fail!?

BEN:

I don't want -

TAYLOR:

You should just do everyone a favor and drop out - !

EDGAR:

That's enough!

(EDGAR tries to intervene and gets in between them. TAYLOR pushes BEN again and trips over EDGAR he falls on the floor. His sunglasses fall off revealing a huge black eye. Everyone is silent. Something shifts. They begin speaking in the Shakespeare's language as if they have become the characters. ****Note: All the Shakespeare in this section is in Italics.**)

MAURA:

*We talk here in the public haunt of men:
Either withdraw unto some private place,
And reason coldly of your grievances,
Or else depart; here all eyes gaze on us.*

TAYLOR:

He started this.

EDGAR:

Let's all just calm down -

TAYLOR:

O calm, dishonourable, vile submission!
Why are you defending him? He isn't worth your time.

BEN:

I don't need this.

EDGAR:

(BEN grabs his stuff and starts to leave.)

Ben, wait! Taylor, it doesn't have to be like this -

TAYLOR:

Rat-catcher!
HEY!

EDGAR:

I said, that's enough!

TAYLOR:

Rat-catcher!
RAT-CATCHER.

(He stops.)

Will you walk?

BEN:

What wouldst thou have with me?

TAYLOR:

Good king of cats, nothing but one of your nine lives;

MAURA:

What is happening - ? Guys -

BEN:

I am for you.

EDGAR:

No, come on -

TAYLOR:

Come, sir.

(They actually fight for real. It's pretty brutal.)

EDGAR:

Don't just - ! Maura, do something!

MAURA:

I - I don't -

EDGAR:

Beat down their weapons!

Gentlemen, for shame, forbear this outrage!

(BEN pulls out an actual knife.)

Guys, please!

(TAYLOR lunges at him.)

Please!

(EDGAR gets in between.)

GUYS, STOP IT!

(BEN stabs TAYLOR under EDGAR's arm. MAURA screams. BEN runs away.)

TAYLOR:
I am hurt.

EDGAR:
Oh god...

MAURA:
TAYLOR!

TAYLOR:
Is he gone, and hath nothing?

MAURA:
Ok, ok, let me see, I can -

TAYLOR:
No, no I'm - he didn't even get me -

(She tries to get up, and screams. She reveals her hand over the wound covered in blood. MAURA runs to her and tries to staunch the bleeding.)

Why the devil came you between us?

EDGAR:
Taylor -

TAYLOR:
I was hurt under your arm.

EDGAR:
I thought all for the best.

TAYLOR:
*A plague o' both your houses!
They have made worms' meat of me:*

(She laughs.)

Worms meat...

(She convulses and dies in MAURA's arms.)

EDGAR:

Taylor - Taylor!

MAURA:

Oh god - oh god - oh god -

EDGAR:

*This day's black fate on more days doth depend;
This but begins the woe, others must end.*

MAURA:

Ben!

(He re-enters.)

BEN:

Is she - ?

(MAURA holds her tighter as if to shield her.)

I'm sorry. I didn't mean -

MAURA:

Why the hell do you have a knife!?

BEN:

I was just defending myself, I didn't -

EDGAR:

Alive, in triumph!

BEN:

No, I - It was an accident!

EDGAR:

*Away to heaven, respective lenity,
And fire-eyed fury be my conduct now!*

MAURA:

NO, STOP IT!

(They fight; EDGAR stabs BEN. They hold eye contact as BEN falls to the ground and dies.)

EDGAR:

I -

MAURA:

Is he - ?

(EDGAR nods.)

You have to get out of here.

(He can't move.)

Away, be gone!

EDGAR:

I -

MAURA:

If you stay you're dead.

(He still can't move.)

I have all the answers, remember? I've got this. Just go.

EDGAR:

Maura -

MAURA:

*Stand not amazed.
Hence, be gone, away!*

EDGAR:

O, I am fortune's fool!

(He runs. MAURA is left onstage with the two bodies. She packs all of her stuff and arranges the bodies so that their arms are crossed over their chests. She takes a deep breath and closes her eyes. There is a long beat. MAURA slowly opens her eyes.)

MAURA:

Scene.

(The lights shift and the two bodies sit up, laughing. EDGAR comes back in, laughing as well. They all help each other up.)

TAYLOR:

Oh my god, did you see that move?

BEN:

Oh my god, it was like - wah!

MAURA:

I didn't think it was going to work, but -

EDGAR:

I thought you were actually going to get stuck under my -

TAYLOR:

No, I know, totally! And the blood pack almost didn't go off -

BEN:

I saw that, but that's why I gave it an extra - and dude! That line!

TAYLOR:

Yeah?

BEN:

The, “why don’t you just do us all a favor and drop out”, oh my god!

TAYLOR:

Yeah, you know. I just wanted something with some -

EDGAR:

Oh man, yeah it was really effective.

TAYLOR:

Thanks, guys.

MAURA:

So - good, this is good? We’re all set for for - ?

TAYLOR:

Oh my god, totally. Guys, we’re absolutely getting an A.

EDGAR:

Hell yes. Oh! Should we, like practice a bow or something?

BEN:

Oh yeah! Guys, just take hands -

(They do.)

MAURA:

Ready? Ok, one, two, three, and -

(They bow until the lights go out. In the dark we hear them leaving. “Yeah, see you Monday! Have a good weekend!”)